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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Religious Dissent and The Chronicle
of the Ukrainian Catholic Church

Summary

The appearance in early 1984 of a Soviet underground journal, The Chronicle of the Ukrainian Catholic Church--which began to reach the West only this January--has provided a valuable new source of information on the activities of Ukrainian Catholics and on the regime's tactics in attempting to discredit the church and its leaders. Although questions have been raised about the sponsorship of the Chronicle, it appears to be an authentic dissident publication. [redacted]

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The increased activism on the part of Ukrainian Catholics revealed by the Chronicle is part of a larger burgeoning of religion taking place in the USSR today. Ukrainian Catholic activism, however, poses special problems for the regime, because of the Ukrainian church's ties to Rome and historical association with Ukrainian national feeling. Over the past several years, the onset of unrest in Poland and the election of a Slavic Pope have increased regime concern that external influences could spur greater dissent among Ukrainian Catholics. [redacted]

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This paper was prepared by [redacted] the Office of Soviet Analysis. Comments and questions may be directed to the author [redacted] or to the Chief, Domestic Policy Division, [redacted]

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The regime has reacted to the Chronicle's appearance by harshly repressing most of those known to be involved in its publication. Ukrainian Catholicism has such a large popular base in Western Ukraine, however, that continued agitation among the church's adherents is likely. This activism will continue to be a thorn in the regime's side, impeding efforts to Sovietize and Russify Western Ukraine.

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Background

Since early 1985, nine issues of a new Soviet underground (samizdat) journal, The Chronicle of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, have reached the United States. A tenth issue was reportedly confiscated by Soviet authorities, but a three-page version of it arrived in the United States this October. The issues do not bear publication dates but from their contents can be dated between early 1984 and January 1985. The Chronicle is a valuable source of information both on recently revived activism among Ukrainian Catholics--probably the largest religious group without legal sanction in the USSR--and on the regime's modus operandi in dealing with the church. It is also important as a tribune from which Ukrainian religious dissenters appeal to foreign and domestic audiences for support.

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The Soviet Regime and the Ukrainian Catholic Church

Regime repression of Ukrainian Catholicism has reflected the close connection between Soviet ecclesiastical and nationality policies. The regime's perception of an invidious tie between religion and nationalism in the USSR--linking Islam with nationalism in Central Asia and the Roman Catholic Church with Lithuanian nationalism, for example--is strengthened in the case of Ukrainian Catholicism by the long history of open church support for Ukrainian separatist movements. Over the last several years, the regime has intensified efforts to liquidate the Ukrainian Catholic Church, probably reflecting increased official concern about Ukrainian susceptibility to Papal and Polish influences.

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The Ukrainian Catholic Church (also known as the Uniate Church), which recognizes Papal authority but observes Eastern rites, has traditionally been the main symbol of Ukrainian national identity--particularly in the Western regions of Ukraine. The church played an important role in popular efforts to resist polonization of the Western Ukrainian community before World War II, when Western Ukraine was under Polish rule. Following Soviet annexation of the region in 1939, Ukrainian Catholics were active in the armed resistance to Soviet power

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[redacted]

during the 1940's and 1950's. This resistance was spurred in part by the regime's postwar decision to outlaw the Ukrainian Catholic Church, forcing its adherents to choose between incorporation into the Russian Orthodox Church or forming underground congregations. [redacted]

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The Uniate Church probably continues to this day to command the allegiance of the bulk of the population in Western Ukraine. There are no available statistics on the size of the underground church, but Western estimates of the number of Uniate believers range from four to five million. Published Soviet sources indicate that Ukraine has a higher percentage of believers than any other Soviet republic and that this percentage doubles in the western oblasts bordering Poland, which has a large Ukrainian minority and a vigorous legal Catholic Church.

[redacted]

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Because of the religious, ethnic, and cultural affinity between Western Ukraine and Poland, the Soviet regime has always been sensitive to the problem of a spillover of political and religious influences. Soviet fears of contagion intensified with the onset of unrest in Poland in 1979. Reporting from Western Ukraine in 1980-81 indicated a high level of interest--especially among young people--in developments in Poland, which Ukrainians were able to follow by watching Polish television. Scattered strikes reportedly occurred in several Western Ukrainian cities during this period. [redacted]

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The election of a Polish Pope in 1979 contributed to the concern of Soviet authorities, who have been apprehensive that Pope John Paul II's vocal support of the Uniate Church would open the door to increased external influences on Ukraine. The Pope increased Radio Vatican's broadcasting time in Slavic languages, appointed East Europeans to several important positions in the Vatican hierarchy, and in 1979 sent a letter of support to the head of the Uniate Church. In his most recent statement on the subject, in early October, Pope John Paul II told a synod of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in exile that the Ukrainian Church "was, and is, unjustly treated and persecuted" and that as a fellow Slav he shared its leaders' grief. [redacted]

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The Ukrainian Catholic Church's affiliation with Rome enables it to maintain direct contact with the international church and, through it, to communicate with Western political and social organizations and with the numerous congregations of Ukrainian Catholics in the emigre community. The Ukrainian Church throughout the world is led in Rome by its own cardinal. Until September 1984 this position was occupied by Josyf Slipyj, whose uncompromising stand on the integrity of the Ukrainian Church and support for Ukrainian national aspirations made him

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[redacted]

anathema to the Soviet regime, which exiled him to Rome in 1963 after imprisoning him in the USSR for eighteen years. In May 1985, following Slipyj's death, 70-year-old Myroslav Ivan Cardinal Lubachivsky--a naturalized United States citizen who was born in the Ukraine and left the Soviet Union in 1938--was named to replace him. [redacted]

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Soviet authorities are attempting to take advantage of Slipyj's death to press harder for a severing of Uniate ties to Rome and the absorption of Ukrainian Catholics into the more malleable Russian Orthodox Church. In the fall of 1984, Ukrainian party chief Shcherbitskiy announced that the party planned to strengthen significantly its efforts to suppress "religious fanaticism," and propagandists have stepped up attacks on the Uniates. [redacted]

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[redacted]

These intensified attempts to bring the Uniates to heel are consistent with growing regime concern not only about Ukrainian Catholicism but also about the recent growth of religion generally in the USSR, particularly among the young. In the 1980s there has been an upsurge in reports of harrassment and arrests of Soviet religious dissidents of all faiths, suggesting that the leadership has mandated a more aggressive policy in dealing with activists of all sects. [redacted]

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Regime repression, however, is not indiscriminate. Official policy makes distinctions among sects, favoring relatively subservient denominations. The Russian Orthodox Church, in particular, is given a preferred status. Closely supervised by the regime and penetrated by the KGB, it serves both as an instrument of Russian imperialism and as a symbol of the Russian national heritage. Thus, the regime has evidently decided to use the Russian Orthodox Church in an effort to subsume the upcoming commemoration of an important milestone both in Christian and in Ukrainian history into a Russian national observance. The event is the 1988 celebration of the millenium of the adoption of Christianity as the state religion by the medieval principality of Kievan Rus, which was centered in present-day Ukraine. Soviet authorities are playing up the Russian Orthodox Church as the successor of the early church to ensure that it dominates the celebration and to downgrade any Ukrainian Catholic role or visibility. [redacted]

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The History of the Chronicle

These increased regime efforts to coopt or control Ukrainian Catholicism are in part a reflection and in part a cause of the heightened Uniate activism that the Chronicle represents. [redacted]

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The Chronicle, which is published by the Action Group for the Defense of the Rights of Believers and the Church, first appeared in Ukraine at the beginning of 1984. The Central Committee of Ukrainian Catholics probably was formed in early 1982 and the Action Group set up in September of that year by five Ukrainian Catholics. The Action Group in turn was very likely modeled on the Lithuanian Catholic Committee for the Defense of Religious Rights, formed in 1978. The Action Group's stated goal is legalization of the Uniate Church and an end to anti-Catholic propaganda campaigns. The Group described the Chronicle, in a letter to the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party announcing formation of the new organization, as a response to increasing repression against the Ukrainian Catholic Church. [redacted]

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The regime was not long in acting. Within a few months of the Chronicle's appearance, the regime moved against the three most visible of its five organizers.

- In November 1984, the secretary of the Action Group, 85-year-old Father Hryhorii Budzins'kyi was arrested and was later reported to have been confined briefly in a mental hospital.
- At about the same time, Vasyl' Kobryn, chairman of the Action Group since the end of 1983, was arrested and charged with "dissemination of knowingly false fabrications discrediting the Soviet political and social system." In March 1985 Kobryn was sentenced to three years in a labor camp for "anti-Soviet slander."
- Yosyp Terelia, first chairman of the Action Group and the person probably most responsible for the compilation of the issues of the Chronicle that have reached the West, went into hiding in November of 1984 after authorities searched his home in the Lvov region of Western Ukraine. Earlier Terelia had ignored a summons to report for questioning. In February 1985 he was arrested for "anti-Soviet activity" [redacted]

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[redacted] In
letters apparently written to his family from prison not

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long after his arrest, Terelia reported that his KGB interrogators had questioned him in particular about the manner in which copies of the Chronicle left the Soviet Union. [redacted]

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The Chronicle ceased appearing for several months after January 1985, and the ninth issue--which reached the West in May--was widely feared to be the last. However, the recent appearance of Number 10 containing January 1985 information indicates that the Action Group may still be active despite the imprisonment of the original leaders. Since there has been a considerable time lag between the printing of issues and their appearance in the West, it is possible that the Chronicle is still being produced and that other issues will make their way to the West. [redacted]

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Contents of the Chronicle

The Chronicle publishes on a broad array of secular and ecclesiastical topics, intermingling informational items about social, political and church-related events in Ukraine with programmatic statements and appeals to foreign governments and groups. This mixing of genres and issues probably intensifies regime anxiety because it demonstrates graphically the close linkage of Ukrainian nationalist activism with the Catholic Church in the republic, as well as the spiritual bond Ukrainian Catholics feel for foreign supporters. [redacted]

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The primary focus of the publication and its main function is to publicize activities of believers and punitive official actions against Ukrainian Catholic activists in Western Ukraine. These informational accounts of specific events are often presented in great detail with respect to date and location, names and job titles of those involved, and the precise treatment of dissenters. In addition, material is published on numbers of believers by denomination and the conditions under which they are held, and often tortured, in prisons, labor camps and psychiatric hospitals. Some items glorify religious martyrdom and report incidents in the lives of those who have chosen to suffer persecution for the sake of their beliefs. The Chronicle provides, as well, evidence of the continued vitality of religious practice, reporting--for example--a fully operational three-year monastery school for children in Transcarpathian Ukraine, and ordination of 81 priests in that region during the past three years. [redacted]

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The Chronicle thus acts as an information bulletin or newspaper for interested audiences abroad and presumably for local believers and sympathizers. Several issues have been almost entirely devoted to copies of letters, autobiographical

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and biographical sketches, recorded court proceedings, and other documents. The letters in particular--most of which are first-hand accounts of incidents of repression or conditions of confinement--are probably the most prompt and efficient method of relaying information to a broad audience, given the difficult conditions under which Soviet samizdat is published and circulated. Other informational items include instructions on what to do during a search or arrest, and acknowledgments of prisoners' birthdays and major religious and national anniversaries. [redacted]

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The Chronicle evidently tries to build a substantial and systematic body of evidence to document the extent and nature of regime repression, publicizing the identities of the perpetrators as well as of the victims, as a basis for continuing activism. A handwritten statement by Yosyp Terelia at the end of the eighth issue informed readers that the journal's printing machines had been confiscated but that every effort must be made to continue to publish some kind of reports--with particular attention to such details as full names (unless publication of the last names of believers would endanger them). In an apparent attempt to enlist support from other denominations, the Chronicle also includes detailed incident reports of persecution of Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Russian Orthodox, Lithuanian Catholics, and Pentecostals. [redacted]

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The Chronicle records the regime's resort to extreme propaganda charges against the Vatican and local Uniates--who are portrayed as neo-fascists, bourgeois nationalists and traitors to the Soviet fatherland. For example, the Chronicle has claimed that the regime has conducted propaganda campaigns designed to "unmask" Action Group members as KGB agents, and to discredit all Ukrainian Catholics by claiming that a radical sub-group of the sect--the Uniate Repentants--was really made up of KGB agents. In fact, the Soviet media have paid considerable attention to this group, describing it as a fanatical sect tightly bound up with Ukrainian nationalism. [redacted]

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The Chronicle also has reported regime attempts to push an institutional solution to the Uniate problem. According to one issue of the Chronicle, Father Budzins'kyi was approached by officials from the republic Council for Religious Affairs responsible for the Lvov Oblast, who told him that the time had come for Ukrainian Catholics to "begin a dialogue with the authorities" and asked him to tell them exactly what the Action Group wants. Another Chronicle issue reported at length a meeting between Terelia and four republic officials, who floated the idea of severing the Ukrainian Catholic Church from Rome. They reportedly assured Terelia that if the Church did this, came "out from underground" and registered with the Council for

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Religious Affairs, it would be allowed to function legally in the Soviet Union. The Chronicle declared that such a "clear provocation" could not be considered. [redacted]

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Another major type of material published in the Chronicle is the open appeal for support. These letters and petitions--intended as part of a campaign to enlist the aid of foreign governments and influential groups--have been addressed to such diverse recipients as Lech Walesa, the President and Knesset of Israel, President Reagan, the Austrian Catholic Central Committee, "the Ukrainian Emigration," and "Christians of the World." [redacted]

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These appeals attest to the deep spiritual and political affinity which Ukrainian Catholics feel for such groups. For example, one issue of the Chronicle included a letter, from Terelia to Walesa, which praised the leaders of the Polish workers' movement and Catholic Church and charged that what the "present rulers in Moscow fear so much" is the "solidarity of all Christians." The same issue published an open letter from Terelia to the Government of Israel in which he asked for Israeli citizenship. Terelia enclosed a copy of this appeal in a letter to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in which he renounced his Soviet citizenship. [redacted]

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The Chronicle also reports on secular developments relating to the Ukrainian human rights movement and popular opposition to the war in Afghanistan. Several reports reflect a popular perception and resentment in Ukraine of a disproportionately large number of local recruits being forced to serve in the Afghanistan war. One issue of the Chronicle printed a June 1984 protest of the exploitation of Ukrainians in military action beyond Soviet borders, signed by the three leading members of the Action Group and addressed to then Minister of Defense Dmitri Ustinov. Also included was an item providing statistics and details of casualties suffered by Soviet troops in the war. [redacted]

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The journal documents considerable civil resistance, reporting that at the end of 1983 as many as 520 Ukrainian Catholics burned their internal passports and refused any contacts with officials--whom they consider representatives of a regime hostile to Christianity. According to the Chronicle, since January 1984, 920 additional passports have been given up in Western Ukraine. [redacted]

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The Question of Authenticity

It is impossible to determine for certain whether the Chronicle is an authentic samizdat journal or a KGB provocation. The central issues pertaining to the question of authenticity revolve around Terelia's role, the openness with

which the Chronicle documents its cases, and the perennial rumors of KGB infiltration. [redacted]

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A major question regarding the Chronicle's legitimacy centers on the personal credibility of Yosyp Terelia, who has spent eighteen of his forty-two years in labor camps and psychiatric hospitals. Terelia's emergence as the primary voice of the Chronicle was sudden. He is not known to have been a vocal member of any religious or human rights movement prior to 1982, and some Western observers are consequently skeptical that he is a bona fide dissident. However, there are some persuasive reasons to believe that Terelia is a sincere spokesman for his cause. There is evidence of an association between Terelia and Mykola Rudenko, leader of the dissident Ukrainian Helsinki Watch Group that was founded in 1976. In the June 1977 court proceedings on the Rudenko case, Terelia was said to have provided Rudenko with "anti-Soviet" documents, and Helsinki Group samizdat mentioned that Terelia was repressed for having contacts with the group. [redacted]

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Terelia's conversation with representatives of the Soviet regime, and his rejection of their proposal for registration and legalization of an autocephalous Ukrainian Uniate Church, reported in the Chronicle, raise questions about his motivation--since legalization of the church has been a goal of the Action Group. However, he may well have judged the severing of ties with Rome and the consequent loss of a protective voice in the West to be too high a price to pay, as have most Ukrainian Catholics in the past. In any event, the Action Group would have scant reason to trust the state's willingness to honor its part of such a bargain once the link to Rome had been broken. [redacted]

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It has been argued that a bona fide samizdat publication would not reveal names of dissidents and specifics of their activities on the grounds that such disclosures unnecessarily increase their vulnerability, setting them up for arrest. Nevertheless, publications of other dissident groups have also revealed identities of activists, despite the danger of playing into the hands of the authorities. During the Brezhnev period many dissident groups felt protected by their very visibility, which drew attention from the West. Today, the decision to publicize activities may also reflect desperation and an acceptance of martyrdom--which is characteristic of religious dissidents among Pentecostal and Baptist groups as well as among Ukrainian Catholics. [redacted]

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The absence of any hard evidence that the Chronicle circulates in Ukraine is not a telling argument against its authenticity. A number of other dissident groups also refrain from circulating their samizdat publications internally due to

repression and instead send them directly to the West. In fact, there has been a pronounced trend over the past two or three years for dissidents to send their writings directly to the West, counting on Western radios to broadcast the contents back into the USSR. [redacted]

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Some emigres and members of other dissident groups are suspicious that the Action Group is controlled or infiltrated by the KGB. It is certainly conceivable that the regime wants to publicize activities of religious believers to lay the groundwork for legal action against them, or to put out bogus documents purporting to demonstrate the treasonous character of Catholic dissent, its collaboration with foreign elements attempting to subvert the USSR internally, and its support for Ukrainian separatism. [redacted]

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On the other hand, the necessity of operating clandestinely makes most Soviet dissident groups vulnerable to charges of KGB collaboration. Such charges are hardly unique to the Chronicle. The Chronicle itself has reported that the KGB has attempted to discredit the Action Group by spreading rumors of a "KGB connection." Moreover, the KGB would be playing a risky game to engage in such an elaborate provocation, which could have the effect of stimulating heightened religious activism among the heavily Catholic population of Western Ukraine. [redacted]

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Conclusions

Assuming the Chronicle's authenticity, its appearance in the face of repression testifies to the vitality of Catholic dissent in Ukraine. The Chronicle reveals more fully than any other current source the trend toward defiance of state authority among some Ukrainian Catholic believers today. The regime's sharp reaction to the Chronicle, in turn, testifies to the seriousness with which Soviet leaders regard this dissent. [redacted]

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As long as Ukrainian Catholics refuse to accept the strictures on religious activity (breaking the tie to Rome, prohibition on proselytizing or giving religious instruction to children) that legalization would require, the regime will continue its differentiated policy of harshly repressing the most active Uniate leaders, while offering blandishments of legality on its own terms. Soviet success in curtailing Ukrainian Catholic dissent will depend to a considerable extent on factors beyond the regime's direct control--whether or not the situation in Poland remains stabilized and the Polish Church placated, whether or not the Pope is willing to sever Vatican ties to the Uniates for the sake of improved relations with Moscow and permission to visit other Catholic congregations in the USSR, whether or not Western political and social groups strongly support the Uniates. [redacted]

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If further issues of the Chronicle appear, it will continue to provide a useful monitor of regime behavior and a unique source of information on trends in Catholic activism. Whatever immediate success the regime may have in suppressing the Chronicle, however, Ukrainian Catholicism retains such a large popular base in Western Ukraine that agitation among the Church's adherents will probably continue. This activism will remain a thorn in the regime's side, impeding efforts to Russify and Sovietize the Ukraine. [REDACTED]

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